

Farm Labor

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Farm Work Slow, Even for December; Wage Rates Continue Moderate Rise

The number of persons working on farms during the survey week of December 20-26 declined to 4,362,000, the lowest reported in 1964. This is 8 percent under the similar period in 1963 and a record low for this period. Effects of holiday activity and winter slowdown stand out when the December total is compared with the totals for the July and June survey weeks when about 7.5 million persons were doing farm work.

Farm family workers numbered 3,581,000 persons during the December survey week, 9 percent below the 1963 previous record low for that month. This number represents only about one person for each of the nearly 3.5 million farms in the nation and reflects conditions at this time of year with crop work virtually ended on most farms.

The number of hired farm workers in December reached a record low of 781,000, 4 percent less than a year earlier. The December total was less than a third of the force of more than 2.5 million hired workers employed in the July survey week.

The average number of all farm workers during the 12 monthly survey periods in 1964 declined to a new low of 6,110,000 persons-6 percent below 1963. Farm family workers averaged 4,506,000 persons-5 percent less than in 1963. Hired farm workers averaged 1,604,000 for the 12 periods, a sharp reduction to a new low, 10 percent under 1963.

The cumulative effect of the use of labor saving machines and methods in recent years is shown by comparisons of 1964 annual averages with comparable totals for the 5 years, 1958-62. Worker numbers, both family and hired, are down about one-seventh. State and national annual averages are compared on page 5. The extension of machine harvesting of cotton has continued to reduce worker numbers in most cotton States. Prior to 1957, the number of workers in the September survey week, swelled by hand pickers in southern fields, regularly represented the peak among survey weeks. Since 1957 July has replaced September as the survey period with most workers.

Wage Rates in 1964 Average 3 Percent above Previous Record

Farm wage rates showed moderate but consistent advances in 1964 as shown by each quarterly wage report. The annual averages produced by weighting the quarterly reports are shown by States on pages 8 and 9. In index terms, the national average of all rates rose 3 percent over 1963. It reached 695 percent of the historic base period 1910-14 and 120 percent of the average for 1957-59.

Increases in rates for principal hiring arrangements were reported in most States. The U.S. rate per hour without board and room averaged \$1.08 per hour in 1964, an increase of 3 percent over 1963.

Wage rates at the beginning of 1965 continued the moderate advance, with composite averages reaching 122 percent of the 1957-59 base, an increase of 5 percent over January 1, 1964.

All rates reported are from the Department's crop and livestock reporters and represent rates paid in their localities or on their own farms. Cash payments only are included with no allowances for values of housing, food, or other items included in total wages.

Christmas and Chores Highlight Survey Week

Christmas was the big thing this survey week for many farm families, and work was kept to the minimum required by livestock and poultry chores. These households, however, spent little time setting up lighted displays of Nativity scenes complete with stables and mangers comparable with the holiday efforts of urban and suburban home decorators. They had real stable scenes to think about, livened by sounds of fine milk cows ready for feed and willing to pay for it with record rates of milk flow. Other farms had hungry steers or thousands of layers or commercial broilers to feed. The great reductions effected in labor needed per production unit on some of these places has not reduced the need for human attention and skilled management.

In parts of Montana and the Dakotas the survey week closely followed destructive blizzards that drove some range livestock miles from home bases and caused severe death losses on some ranches.

The Christmas period also brought disaster to farms along several principal streams in the Northwest, especially in parts of Oregon, Washington, Northern California, and Idaho. Heavy early snows in the mountains were followed by unusually heavy and prolonged rains that added the melted snow to the torrents converging in stream channels. Livestock and people were dispossessed by the floods, and damage by erosion and silting of pastures was extensive. Major reconstruction jobs on fences and buildings will be needed on many farms, aside from repairs needed on bridges, roads, and other local facilities.

Livestock were able to forage with little interruption in harvested fields of corn, soybeans, and sorghum in principal farming areas, minimizing the care needed for livestock on many farms.



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